

Education TURNKEY Electronic Distribution, Inc.

256 North Washington Street
Falls Church, Virginia 22046-4549
(703) 536-2310
Fax (703) 536-3225

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 27, 2010
TO: TechMIS Subscribers
FROM: Charles Blaschke and Blair Curry
SUBJ: New Opportunities Related to Parent Involvement, Response-to-Intervention, Professional Development, and Use of ARRA Funds in Urban Districts

A number of recently released reports and new developments point to new or expanded opportunities in Response-to-Intervention approaches and its components, parent involvement/engagement in instruction, professional development -- particularly for aspiring teachers -- and specific areas, such as "SES partnering," in urban districts which receive waiver approvals.

On May 18th we sent two Stimulus Funding Alerts. One focused on important considerations in negotiating i³ grant situations where subscribers participate as "other partners" or contractors, particularly related to copyright issues and in-kind contributions toward the 20 percent match. The other Alert displayed an analysis of the amount of State Fiscal Stabilization Funds which remained after "outlays" in each state, as of April 16th. Several states are likely to have remaining funds after filling state aid formula "maintenance of effort" requirements; this money could be reallocated in four to six months to districts which might not be expecting to receive such funds.

The Washington Update includes the following:

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A new report based on a survey conducted last fall by the Council of the Great City Schools describes initiatives undertaken by 40 of the 66 large district CGCS members using ARRA stimulus funds and suggests a number of opportunities which exist in many districts including:
 - increased opportunities for firms to partner with districts that provide their own SES;
 - district-level purchases as ARRA funds decision-making is increasingly becoming centralized;
 - use of Section 613 maintenance of effort option money to free-up local resources which can be used to purchase professional development and products; and

- uses of Title I ARRA funds to upgrade instructional programs, purchase supplemental materials, provide Response-to-Intervention strategies and behavioral supports.
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The new annual Response-to-Intervention Adoption Survey 2010 projects continued growth in the RTI niche market with a major expansion in 2010-11 school year for behavioral and math interventions and professional development in middle and secondary schools. RTI strategy “components” which are likely to be in highest demand include data-driven decision-making tools to help inform instruction, research-based academic interventions, tools to foster teacher collaboration, and problem-solving approaches. Professional development for teachers across all of the above and overall RTI strategy implementation will also be in very high demand.
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In response to criticisms of the proposed “blueprint” and proposed FY 2011 budget, Secretary Duncan now supports doubling the Title I parent involvement set-aside in large districts to 2% and allow states to set aside about \$145 million for competitive grants to expand evidence-based parental involvement practices.
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A new survey of current and aspiring teachers and administrators conducted by *Project Tomorrow* identifies technology-related opportunities based on educators perceived needs and also suggests who to approach with certain products and services. Aspiring teachers feel a great need for professional development in using online curriculum and textbooks, learning management systems, and technology to differentiate instruction for students.
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Retiring House Appropriations Committee Chairman Obey’s skills in the appropriations process will be sorely missed, while a greater loss could be his influence over education legislation in the ESEA reauthorization process.
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Pressures on Secretary Duncan to provide greater flexibility beyond the four School Improvement Grant intervention models are mounting from various quarters through either legislative action or regulatory relief, while the question of when is up in the air.
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Miscellaneous Items:

 - a) USED Announces 20 States to Receive \$250 Million for State Longitudinal Data System Initiatives Funded Under the 2009 ARRA Stimulus Portion and Administered by the Institute for Education Sciences at USED
 - b) The Final K-12 and English/Language Arts Common Core Standards is Scheduled to be Released on June 2nd, the Day after the Phase II Race to the Top State Applications are Due

As of this writing, the passage of the \$23 billion Education Jobs Bill is unclear. Proponents, including Secretary Duncan and Chairman Dave Obey, argue that it would save about 300,000 teacher and other jobs next year. If the bill passes and uses the SFSF funding formula or the Title I formula to allocate state portions of the \$23 billion to districts, these funds, which are to be used for salaries and benefits and on-the-job training, could free-up local District funds which could be used for purchasing products and services. We will follow developments in this area and provide a Special Funding Alert if developments occur.

State profile updates focus on states' plans to apply under Race to the Top, changes in State assessment, and the effects of tight state budgets.

Washington Update

Vol. 15, No. 5, May 27, 2010

New Report Describes Large District Initiatives Under ARRA Stimulus Funding and Suggests Opportunities Which Exist in Most

Based on a survey conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools late last year, 40 of its 66 large district members described current/planned initiatives using ARRA provisions and funds. Some of these initiatives could provide opportunities for many TechMIS subscribers as highlighted below.

Not surprisingly, 37 of the responding 40 districts reported that they “intended,” last fall, to obtain waivers from having to set aside 20 percent of Title I ARRA funds for supplemental educational services (SES) and the school choice option. Also, as the report noted, “Almost half of the respondents (47.5 percent) indicated interest in waivers allowing districts identified for improvement to act as their own SES providers.” Slightly less than 50 percent of respondents also said they would seek waivers for the ten percent set-aside for professional development in districts identified for improvement. If these districts followed through on their stated intentions, then the opportunities for partnering with districts should increase. These findings also suggest large urban districts placed a higher priority on professional development than on SES by not requiring a waiver from the ten percent set-aside.

About 33 of the 40 districts (82.5 percent) indicated they would request waivers of the

Title I 15 percent carryover limitation. It is likely that districts which did not request such a waiver will have to obligate some unspent Title I funds over the 15 percent carryover limitation by June 30th. This would be particularly true if the district did not request a waiver of the 20 percent SES set-aside and applied the 20 percent not only to Title I regular, but also to Title I ARRA funds.

Almost 90 percent of large urban districts indicated they would expand Title I services to schools which previously had not received Title I funds. Twelve districts planned to expand Title I services to K-12 schools, while eight districts planned to support Title I high schools and 15 other districts indicated planned expansion into both K-12 and high schools. Even though the question was not asked, we suspect that a large number of existing Title I schools expanded their services to higher grade levels in both math and reading (or in at least one of the two subject areas); this is what a large number of Title I district officials told us during the National Title I Conference in February. Individuals who conducted the CGCS analysis confirm that use of Title I ARRA funds to expand services in new Title I schools was encouraged by the provision that any technology and/or instructional materials/products purchased for use in new Title I schools could remain there after September 30, 2011, even if Title I services were withdrawn from that school.

As noted in the CGCS report, the 40

responding districts estimated that slightly over 50 percent of Title I ARRA funds were spent on district-level activities with a little over 40 percent allocating such funds to individual schools. Eleven districts spent 75 percent or more of their Title I funds on district-level activities; however, as the report argues, many districts wanted to reserve significantly more Title I ARRA funds at the district level to “enact new reforms that had not been in previously or extensively pursued. However, some districts were informed by their states that all Title I funding under ARRA had to be allocated to the building level, with each participating school receiving a specific allocation.” It is likely that a significantly larger portion would have been spent on district-level activities if USED’s September 2009 Title I guidance on “Use of Funds” would have been made available much earlier; this late guidance allowed districts to “reserve some or even all of its Title I allocation in certain situations for priorities determined at the district level.” It is very likely that the percentage of Title I ARRA funds allocated for district-level activities increased significantly in 2010 and will continue to be decided at the district level through September 30, 2011.

The survey also found that 18 of the 40 districts were able to use the IDEA Section 613 provision which allowed districts to reduce their local maintenance of effort (MOE) by up to 50 percent of their IDEA increase, thereby freeing that amount of local resources which, in 2008, were allocated to special education programs. Only fifteen of the 18 districts took advantage of this option. The survey found that some of the districts used freed-up resources to increase “technology capacity for regular and special education” and to

provide or expand “teacher and administrator professional development.” Eleven districts reported they could not use the Section 613 maintenance of effort provision because they were told by the state they had to set aside 15 percent of IDEA funds for early intervening services because of overrepresentation of minorities in their special education program. Another five districts reported they were unable to reduce maintenance of effort because they were out of compliance with IDEA requirements.

In terms of use of funds, the report states that the 40 urban districts used State Fiscal and Stabilization Funds for hiring/retaining almost 30,000 FTE staff, while Title I ARRA funds accounted for about 11,000 FTEs and IDEA retained almost 9,000 FTE jobs.

In a concluding section, the report argues that more SFSF funds were used for job retention because the funds were more flexible and were received earlier than Title I and IDEA funds, which were used more for materials, technology, and professional development. Title I ARRA funds were used for a number of “productive educational purposes,” including professional development, extended learning time, upgrading instructional programs, supplemental materials for ELLs, instructional coaches, community engagement, behavioral supports, and Response-to-Intervention strategies, among other activities.

The “Investing Wisely and Quickly” report also includes detailed profiles on the use of funds in 40 responding districts. For a copy go to: http://www.cgcs.org/Pubs/Stimulus_Report.pdf

New Response-to-Intervention Adoption Survey 2010 Projects Continued Growth in RTI Market Niche with Major Expansion in 2010-11 School Year, Especially for Behavioral and Math Interventions and Professional Development in Middle and Secondary Schools

The annual survey, conducted by the Council of Administrators of Special Education (part of CEC), NASDE, and AASA and supported by Spectrum K12, has found continued growth in the use of Response-to-Intervention among local districts. The survey also projected major increases next school year, particularly in middle and secondary schools in several areas, including behavioral and math interventions.

Slightly over 60 percent of respondents indicated they are currently either in full implementation or in the process of district-wide implementation this year -- up from 24 percent in 2007. While most implementation is at the elementary level, over the last year implementation of middle school math interventions was reported in 48 percent of districts -- up from 26 percent -- and behavioral interventions increased to 42 percent -- up from 25 percent last year. Even greater percentage increases occurred in the area of secondary math, from 14 percent to 34 percent of the responding districts, and for behavioral interventions, from 18 percent to 31 percent. Also at the secondary level, interventions in the area of reading increased from 19 percent to 43 percent of the responding districts. In terms of future plans, respondents indicated increased RTI adoptions in the areas of math and science at both the middle and high

school levels.

In terms of RTI components, about 50 percent of respondents indicated they would be implementing a number of RTI components in 2010-11, including "Assessments to monitor progress" (51%), "data used to guide decisions" (52%), "Research-based academic interventions" (54%), "Collaborative meetings held" (49%), and "Problem-solving approach used" (50%). RTI components for behavioral interventions which will enjoy the most significant expansions next year would include "Research-based behavioral interventions" (40%), "Assessments to monitor progress" (34%), Data used to guide decisions (41%), and Problem-solving approach used (42%).

Most of these RTI components which districts anticipate expanding use next school year are important components of the Administration's new policy initiatives such as School Improvement Grants and Race to the Top grants. They are also integral parts of other high-priority Administration initiatives, such as the Promise Neighborhoods competitive grant program (expanding from \$10 million to \$210 million next year) which includes significant behavioral and student support components.

As we found in our TURNKEY survey of technology use in special education in 2006-07, teacher training/professional development in the implementation of RTI approaches is a critical component. The Spectrum K12 2010 survey reported that 90 percent of respondents felt that "Insufficient teacher training" was a significant or somewhat significant obstacle, with slightly over 80 percent of respondents identifying "Lack of intervention resources" as an

obstacle.

In response to the question “how is your district funding Response to Intervention?”, 57 percent checked “General Funds,” followed by 52 percent reporting “Title I” funds, and 43 percent using “ARRA Stimulus Funds.” In the organizations’ 2009 survey, 40 percent of respondents said they planned to use Title I funds to support RTI. A discussion with study analysts familiar with the data indicated that, of the 43 percent indicating use of ARRA stimulus funds, 74 percent indicated using Title I stimulus funds, while 60 percent reported using IDEA stimulus funds. Thirty-one percent of the respondents indicated using “IDEA Early Intervening Services” funding, with 20 percent of all respondents indicating they had to allocate 15 percent of IDEA funds for early intervening services due to their having significant disproportionality/over-representation of minorities in special education programs. Of those using IDEA Early Intervening Services funds, 30 percent were participating at the 15 percent level, while 34 percent used only 1-5 percent for RTI. When asked to estimate how much of overall special education expenditures were used for RTI, six percent indicated more than ten percent of special education expenditures, while 18 percent estimated less than five percent; almost 70 percent did not know that percentage.

As we have described in numerous TechMIS reports over the last eight or nine years, the Response-to-Intervention effort began a decade or so ago as part of a grassroots movement which was nurtured by NCLB programs such as the Reading First initiative and then bolstered by the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. The rationale for

early intervening services/RTI initially underlying the Bush Administration priority was to reduce overall expenditures for special education services from all funding sources by reducing the number of referrals of borderline students to special education. The mandate of Federal funding covering 40 percent of the expenditures for special education could be met by reducing the total amount of expenditures rather than having to continue to increase the Federal appropriations portion under IDEA. The Federal portion has hovered at 18-20 percent during most of the last decade. In response to a question included in the 2010 survey, the report concluded “In respondent districts that had sufficient data to determine the impact of RTI, 76% indicated RTI has led to an improvement in Adequate Yearly Progress vs. 24% that indicated it has not. 87% indicated RTI has reduced the number of special education referrals.” A key Senate committee staff person, who was one of the main authors of the 2004 IDEA reauthorization and a key supporter of Response-to-Intervention, recently stated that there would not be a reauthorization of ESEA until some of the bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles to expanded use of RTI were solved within the U.S. Department of Education.

For a copy of the survey go to:
www.spectrumK12.com/rti/the_rti_corner/rti_adoption_report

Bowing to Criticism from Parent Advocacy Groups, Secretary Duncan Proposes to Double the Parent Involvement Set-Aside Allocated to Large Districts to 2% of Title I Funds and Allow States to Set-Aside About \$145 Million for Competitive Grants to Expand Evidence-Based Parental Involvement Practices

As we noted in our March 24th [TechMIS Washington Update](#), the National PTA and other parent advocacy groups criticized the Administration's proposed "blueprint" for reauthorization and the proposed FY 2011 budget for failing to place a high priority on parent engagement activities, which Secretary Duncan and President Obama have called for in numerous speeches over the last two years. In remarks to the Mom Congress on May 3rd, the Secretary stated, "So today, based on feedback we received about the blueprint, we propose to double the funding for parent engagement -- from one to two percent of Title I dollars -- or a total of \$270 million. At the same time, in order to drive innovation -- we will allow states to use another one percent of Title I funds -- about \$145 million -- for grant programs that support, incentivize, and help expand district-level, evidence-based parental involvement practices. We want districts to think big about family engagement -- to propose new strategies and hone in on best practices that raise student achievement." In his speech, Secretary Duncan recalled his mother's experience in setting up a free after-school tutoring program in 1961 in a church basement which he and his siblings attended every day and at which he eventually became a tutor. He noted that, "I learned that a high-quality tutoring program can be a good thing. But a high-quality tutoring program run by caring

adults is a great thing. It can literally help transform lives."

As we mentioned in our March 24th TechMIS issue, Secretary Duncan has on several occasions mentioned that his office would not approve waiver requests from states that would allow districts receiving \$500,000 or more in Title I funding not to set-aside the one percent of their Title I ARRA funds for parental engagement. In his speech before the Mom Congress supported and attended by many members of various parent advocacy groups, the Secretary said the blueprint would provide a major increase from \$10 million to \$210 million for Promise Neighborhoods, and "As the PTA thoughtfully recommended, our proposal allows family engagement to be included as one measure of success in teacher and principal evaluations. And it would define professional development of teachers and school leaders to include working with families."

Two days after the Secretary's speech, Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY) introduced HR 5211, the Family Engagement in Education Act, which would amend ESEA Title I requiring districts to "reserve" 2% of their Title I allocations for family involvement and engagement. The Act would also create a state infrastructure to support family engagement through statewide and local family engagement centers. The Bill calls for a number of the recommended activities supported by the National PTA, which were listed in our March 24th [Washington Update](#). Incentive grants would be made available for a number of allowable uses, including helping parents learn about and use technology in their children's education, for family literacy, and to provide technical assistance

to expand scientifically-based early childhood/parent education programs.

There are two major issues which should be of concern to appropriate TechMIS subscribers. One relates to whether the 2% set-aside proposed by Secretary Duncan or the 2% “reserve” in the McCarthy Bill would include any new Title I funds or would the parent engagement funds be reallocated from existing district Title I allocations. As reported in Education Daily on May 12th, groups such as AASA and the National State Title I Directors Association, while supporting improvement in family engagement are concerned that, without increased or new funding, this is a case of “robbing Peter to pay Paul.” Parental engagement could be at the expense of instruction time and/or materials. AASA has argued in the past that it is not opposed to current activities funded through set-asides such as SES and professional development if separate funding streams with additional money would be provided, which appears to be the case with respect to the current 1% set-aside for parent involvement.

A second issue is whether the current law requiring 95 percent of the 1% set-aside for parent involvement to be allocated from the district Title I reserve to Title I schools will hold. Some observers who have followed the parent involvement allocations and USED monitoring of the use of such funds by states and districts feel that, if there will be new funds to cover a portion of the 2% reserve, the new 1% might be allowed to be used at the district level for activities such as increased outreach and other activities which can generate some economies of scale. In the Education Daily article, USED spokesperson Sandra Abrevaya referred to

the Secretary’s remarks by noting, “the evidence shows that 1 percent isn’t enough to do this work in a quality manner, and as we give districts greater flexibility in how they use these funds, we’ll also ask that they commit to spending more funds on a systemic strategy.”

New Survey Points to Emerging Opportunities and Possible Approaches in Positioning Products and Services

Conducted by the non-profit group *Project Tomorrow*, a 2009 survey of teachers and administrators identifies possible technology-related opportunities and who to approach with certain products and services related to emerging technologies. The survey identifies significant perception “gaps” and “similarities” between groups of administrators, principals, existing teachers, and “aspiring teachers” which are, in some respects, surprising. Trend information also suggests that perceptions among some of these groups are changing.

One such area of opportunity relates to online learning. An earlier *Speak Up* survey found that student interest in online learning has “exploded” over the last few years; the percentage of high school students taking online classes has doubled over the last year with a third more expressing interest in taking at least one course. The survey report argues that “Aspiring teachers provide another opportunity for school districts to meet the pent-up demand for online classes,” as over half of administrators want aspiring teachers to have experience participating in an online class before they complete certification. A quarter of

administrators feel that it is “important for aspiring teachers to have the skills to teach an online class” yet only four percent of aspiring teachers report they are learning how to do so in their college courses. Almost 50 percent of aspiring teachers felt a need for professional development in using online curriculum with about 40 percent indicating a training need for using online textbooks and podcasts or video. Interestingly, far fewer existing teachers felt similar professional development needs. While aspiring teachers view online classes (21%) and learning management systems (44%) as means for enhancing student achievement, only four percent report they are learning how to teach online classes in their current methods courses.

A similar professional development opportunity exists for beginning teachers to incorporate digital media into instruction. The aspiring teachers top five picks include “learning how to use technology to differentiate instruction for students” (75%), “incorporating digital resources in a lesson” (68%), “locating and using electronic teaching aids” (67%), “creating and utilizing video or podcasts within a lesson” (57%) and “using electronic productivity tools” (57%). About one-quarter expressed interest in “learning how to incorporate mobile devices within instruction using social networking sites or social networking tools to teach.”

The survey also asked administrators and current teachers how they would evaluate/select new emerging digital media for use in designing “their ultimate school.” The criteria being used by administrators versus teachers varied in some cases significantly, for example, 42 percent of current teachers preferred digital resources

created by a “practicing teacher” compared to 31 percent of principals. On the other hand, 38 percent of principals preferred digital resources developed by organizations recognized for having “content expertise,” such as the National Science Foundation or universities, compared to only 21 percent of teachers who used this criterion. About 20 percent of both principals and teachers preferred digital resources developed by media or content producers such as NBC, Discovery, and PBS. As the report noted, teachers continue to rely heavily on “word-of-mouth,” with over 40 percent relying on colleague referrals, followed by recommendations from education associations (27%), education blogs or websites (20%), or their state department of education (19%). The report also notes that administrators are less concerned about finding free appropriate digital resources and more concerned about training teachers in how to use such resources.

The report concluded that aspiring teachers, compared to veteran classroom teachers, are “five times more likely to use electronic portfolios for their students; once again illustrating the natural affinity they have towards technology that will enable them to create digitally rich learning experiences.” Interestingly in the area of online instruction and the use of new digital media, district administrators and principals’ perceptions and identified needs are more aligned with aspiring teachers than with the perceptions and identified needs of classroom veteran teachers.

For a copy of the report go to: <http://www.tomorrow.org/speakup/pdfs/SU09UnleashingTheFuture.pdf>

Retiring House Appropriations Committee Chairman Obey's Skills in the Appropriations Process Will Be Sorely Missed, While a Greater Loss Could Be His Influence Over Education Legislation in the ESEA Reauthorization Process

Chairman Obey's announcement on May 5th that he would retire at the end of his term is a major development impacting not only education funding, but also possible legislative policy changes this year. As Chairman of both the Education Subcommittee and Full Appropriations Committees, his powerful influence was unquestioned, yet few acknowledged his critical influence on legislation and oversight.

Chairman Obey, who was reelected for his 20th term in November 2008, played a lead role last year in the passage of ARRA and held budget hearings on ESEA reauthorization in early March this year. The Chairman has a long history of using the appropriations process to legislate. During the 1990s, his staff, working with representatives of several "entrepreneurial" regional education labs, included in the Appropriations Act of 1998, a new program with large budget of almost \$50 million. This became the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Act which, until its "sunset" during the last year of the Bush Administration, allocated about \$1 billion in competitive grants. When the Reading First mismanagement and conflict of interest allegations surfaced during the latter part of President Bush's first term, Chairman Obey's Committee initiated and expanded a major oversight role, often citing audit reports from the USED Inspector General's office; and during the second Bush term,

Chairman Obey was instrumental in eliminating Reading First appropriations. For those of us who follow the annual appropriations process, it soon became clear that, during the Bush Administration, one could not get a complete picture of the annual Education Appropriations Act until one read the full Committee report and his "managers' special report," as numerous paragraphs were inserted, expressing Congressional intent.

During the March hearings, in response to Secretary Duncan's testimony on the President's proposed FY 2011 budget, the Chairman questioned -- in light of the economic impact on local school districts -- the appropriateness of the Administration's proposed reform initiatives that would have converted any increases in Title I formula funds into competitive grants. He stated, "I do not understand why, when we have a shot at it, we do not emphasize Title I before we do anything else....I will be much more interested in reform two years from now, once the economy has stabilized. I am not sure that we are on the same page about how we proceed from here." A somewhat similar proposal made in the President's proposed FY 2010 budget to reallocate \$1 billion of regular Title I funds to School Improvement Grants was dismissed and eliminated by Chairman Obey.

Michele McNeil, Education Week blogger of *Politics K-12*, noted that, when learning of Obey's reported announcement, "U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan & Co. are probably greeting the news with (silent) cheers of joy and (discreetly) breaking open the champagne....Obey has been super skeptical of Duncan's reform agenda almost from the get-go, saying, for instance, that the Department is setting cash-strapped school

districts up for failure by expecting them to make progress on the four assurances (teacher quality, standards and assessments, data systems, school improvement).” Because Chairman Obey was critical of the Secretary’s proposed FY 2011 budget, along with the so-called “blueprint” for ESEA reauthorization, it is not clear whether Obey’s announcement might breathe some new life into the Administration’s attempt to reauthorize the ESEA this year. Another issue is whether or not his retirement announcement would affect the passage of the FY 2011 appropriations by the end of this fiscal year in September or through subsequent Continuing Resolutions. If, as a result of the mid-term election, the Republicans gain control of the House, they would determine the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee for next session. Without a final Appropriations Bill, education could be funded at existing levels under a Continuing Resolution over the next year.

Several of Chairman Obey’s comments to reporters who knew him very well such as E.J. Dionne Jr. from the Washington Post are very resonant with some of us. As Dionne wrote, “He had pondered retirement before, but stayed on because he was angry at what he saw as the ‘arrogance’ of the second President Bush and “was determined to outlast him.”” Pointing to an enormous vacuum that has to be filled, Dionne also highlighted an opportunity for some young politician by concluding, “All you have to do is believe in what you’re saying, master the legislative process, care about important issues, speak candidly and gruffly and be willing to make enemies -- knowing that some people will like you just because you’re so uncompromisingly who you are.”

Who will be the next House Appropriation Committee Chairman is too early to tell, but whoever it is will not likely completely fill the vacuum.

Pressures to Provide Greater Flexibility Beyond the Four School Improvement Grant Intervention Models Mounting from Various Quarters

During May, criticism of the four prescribed intervention models under School Improvement Grants increased from numerous quarters ranging from teacher union-supported legislative “frameworks,” to skeptical researchers, to experienced and successful turnaround entities. While it is almost inevitable that USED will allow greater flexibility by providing more options for districts to select from a menu of proven research-based practices, the question is whether this will occur through regulatory relief from USED or legislative action, including reauthorization of ESEA and when.

In a briefing on May 20th, Representative Judy Chu (D-CA) released “A New Framework and Principles for Revising School Improvement Grants” which argued that the current SIG initiative dooms teachers and leaders to failure, ignores student needs, and constrains school flexibility. Chu’s report calls for greater flexibility in School Improvement Grants by allowing districts to choose from a “menu of research-driven options.” Citing the Center on Education Policy’s reports on successful turnarounds of schools in restructuring, the brief states, “By allowing schools flexibility and choice, they can adapt their plans as needs arise.” To remove the barriers to

learning and teaching, the document calls for significant resources to be allocated to positive behavioral supports, response-to-intervention, extended learning time, well-rounded curricula, wraparound services, and direct student support activities organized into a comprehensive, full-continuum of interventions. Removing principals and staff in Tier I and Tier II schools, as the four models require, “will not directly lead to student achievement.” Moreover, “political wins such as teacher firings will only continue to deny children in priority schools a quality education,” a position supported by both the AFT and NEA. Specific recommendations include:

- building capacity and improving instruction through personalizing professional development, implementing response-to-intervention, and enhancing a positive school climate;
- extending the turnaround time needed to three to five years while justifying principal and teacher replacements based solely on an in-depth needs assessment of the school; and
- removing the limitation on the number of Tier I and Tier II schools in a district that can use the transformation model (the current cap is five).

During the same week, hearings before the House Education and Labor Committee focused on turning around persistently low-achieving schools. Officials from rural districts reiterated their major difficulty in implementing any of the four models for a number of reasons, including the lack of an available pool of replacement principals and teachers. John Simmons, President of

Strategic Learning Initiatives, which had provided technical assistance for ten Chicago schools in restructuring, and Jessica Johnson, Chief Program Officer for Improvement Services at Learning Points Associates agreed on some common ingredients of successful turnaround activities identified by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, including the following essential supports for school improvements:

- shared leadership and responsibility among staff, parents, and students;
- professional development in sharing practices that work;
- high-quality instruction;
- ongoing formative assessments;
- engagement of parents at home along with community support; and
- a school climate conducive to shared trust and collaboration.

In a press release relating to the reauthorization of ESEA, Committee Chairman George Miller stated, “... we will focus on research-based, proven, core elements of successful turnaround identified today by our witnesses. When coupled with a strong use of data and a rigorous planning process, we can help provide local communities the flexibility to succeed.” Reiterating some of the lessons learned as compiled by researchers, the Chairman also stated, “Research outlined by witnesses shows that successful school turnaround must include flexibility, shared leadership, professional development, capacity building, extended school and learning time, community involvement and beyond.”

Even though Chairman Miller and his Senate counterpart, Chairman Tom Harkin, are drafting ESEA reauthorization language

hoping to make available a draft this summer, the odds of a reauthorization occurring this year are very small in light of the shortening legislative timeframe and other more pressing priorities. While there appears to be some consensus among Congressional leadership for the need for greater flexibility and research-based options which could be used in addition to the four current turnaround intervention models, the key question is how seriously Secretary Duncan will consider them. And, if so, without reauthorization this year, what mechanisms could be used to implement them if not for this coming year, but for the year following. One option would be to include amendments in the FY 2011 Appropriations Bill, an approach which could be difficult without the skilled support of retiring Chairman Dave Obey. As you may recall, the passage of the 2010 Appropriations Act on December 16, 2009 included some major legislative changes to ARRA, particularly relating to School Improvement Grants and the eligibility of certain districts to receive SIG funds. This amendment approach could happen.

Another option would be to provide additional regulatory relief which groups such as AASA, NSBA, and the Council of the Great City Schools have already begun to pressure the Secretary to provide. Even though Secretary Duncan stated last year that districts could be provided additional opportunities for waivers and regulatory relief this year, several observers believe that USED is not currently planning to follow through.

Miscellaneous

- **USED Announces 20 States to Receive \$250 Million for State Longitudinal Data System Initiatives Funded Under the 2009 ARRA Stimulus Portion and Administered by the Institute for Education Sciences at USED**

Applications for state longitudinal systems from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands were reviewed by an independent peer review panel. The following states received grants: Arkansas - \$9.8 million; Colorado - \$17.4 million; Florida - \$10.0 million; Illinois - \$11.9 million; Kansas - \$9.1 million; Maine - \$7.3 million; Massachusetts - \$13.0 million; Michigan - \$10.6 million; Minnesota - \$12.4 million; Mississippi - \$7.6 million; New York - \$19.7 million; Ohio - \$5.1 million; Oregon - \$10.5 million; Pennsylvania - \$14.3 million; South Carolina - \$14.9 million; Texas - \$18.2 million; Utah - \$9.6 million; Virginia - \$17.5 million; Washington - \$17.3 million; Wisconsin - \$13.8 million.

- **The Final K-12 Common Core Standards English/Language Arts is Scheduled to be Released on June 2nd, the Day after the Phase II Race to the Top State Applications are Due**

Planned adoption of these common core standards is worth a significant number of points in scoring state Race to the Top applications. The public comment period on the draft common core standards document closed on April 2nd; thus far all states but Texas and Alaska have indicated intentions to adopt the

common core standards and about ten states anticipated adding additional state-generated standards to the common core standards. Depending on the results of the November contested gubernatorial races in the 38 states, the number of adopting states could be reduced.

According to a recent Education Week article, the common core standards initiative is not attempting to develop a set of proficiency standards for English language learners. As Keith Gayler, Director of Standards for the CCSSO stated, "As far as developing [the English-proficiency standards] ourselves, I don't see that happening." Over the last decade, a group of states under the leadership of Wisconsin, known as the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium, has developed standards and assessments for English language learners among its 23-state membership. The Executive Director of WIDA, Timothy Boals, noted in the Education Week article, "We do feel a need to look [our] standards and make sure we're in sync with what is happening nationally with the common core." Under NCLB, states were required to administer tests for English language learners in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. While more states may join the WIDA consortium, states such as California,

Texas, and New York will likely use standards and assessments which they have developed.

It appears that a similar situation exists with alternative assessments and in modified performance standards for certain groups of students with disabilities. Earlier this year, Mark Sherman, special education reporter for Education Daily, concluded that there will likely be no change in the alternative assessments requirement for students with severe cognitive disabilities -- known as the "one percent test" -- either by Congress or USED. As an April 6th Education Daily article notes, the common core state standards initiative could "boost learning opportunities" for students with disabilities because it should focus on mastery of a concise set of benchmarks for each grade. However, USED's recent RFP for developing common core assessments does not call for inclusion of the so-called "two percent" alternative assessment with modified standards which states were "required" to use with students with certain other disabilities in 2007 and 2008. As with the ELL situation, it appears that the degree to which assessments for this group of students with disabilities will depend on what the winning consortia of states propose to develop.

Alabama Update

May 2010

Alabama Governor Bob Riley has blamed the State teachers union for his State's failure to be a finalist in the first round of the Federal Race to the Top competition. Alabama had applied for \$181 million under RTTT but was not considered likely to win in part because of the State's ban on charter schools. The governor cited the union's "obstructionism" for the State legislature recent actions to kill the charter schools bill.

Alaska Update

May 2010

According to Education Week, Alaska has decided not to submit an application for up to \$75 million in Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition. State officials say RTTT would require Alaska would have to change too much too fast and that it is a bad fit for Alaska because it is too rigid, top-down, and urban-centric. In the 2008-09 school year, 224 of the State's 505 schools failed to meet Federal adequate-yearly progress requirements.

Arizona Update

May 2010

In mid-May, Arizona voters approved a one cent increase in the State sales tax for the next three years. According to the Arizona Daily Star, the increase will raise a projected \$918 million in the first year, about two-thirds of which will go to K-12 education. But, with the State facing a \$3 billion budget shortfall, public education is likely to see \$160 million in cuts even with the tax increase. The University of Arizona estimated that the sales tax increase would result in the saving of 13,000 jobs (despite an estimated loss of 7,400 private sector jobs) and would preserve \$442 million in Federal matching funds (i.e., most likely meeting MOE requirements).

The Arizona Daily Sun reports that the Arizona Senate has approved a bill that would prohibit students from moving to fourth grade unless they pass the reading section of the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test. HB 2732 requires notification to parents before the end of third grade that a student is not reading at an acceptable level. It also requires that schools provide instructional help -- summer school, online reading instruction, before-/after-school instruction. The measure includes exceptions for students with disabilities and English language learners and would not become effective until 2013.

According to The Arizona Republic, a new State law is intended to end ethnic studies classes in Arizona's public and charter schools. Specifically, the law bans classes that:

- promote the overthrow of the U.S. Government;
- promote resentment toward a race or class of people;
- advocate ethnic solidarity instead of treating students as individuals; and
- are designed primarily for students of a specific ethnic group.

If the State determines that a district or charter school has violated the law, it can withhold a portion of the district's or school's State funding.

California Update

May 2010

California's application in Round 1 of the Federal Race to the Top was unsuccessful in large part because the State's plan was opposed by three-quarters of the State's teacher unions and about half of the school districts declined to participate. According to the [Los Angeles Times](#), California's new RTTT strategy calls for three large school districts -- Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Fresno -- to apply. Los Angeles would be put forward as a model and laboratory for reform, the district citing its teacher effectiveness task force and its efforts to put schools in charge of their own budgets. Long Beach has often been cited for its leading-edge improvements. The U.S. Department of Education initially said that California's approach would receive appropriate consideration. But in early May, Secretary Duncan denied he supported California's planned strategy, questioning its legality.

The California Learning Resources Network reviews "digital resources" submitted by textbook publishers, teachers, and others to ensure that the materials are appropriate for use in California classrooms. According to [Education Week's Curriculum Matters](#) blog, the State has reviewed more than 30 free digital textbooks for high school math and science. Although the Network's reviews do not constitute State approval of the texts, they do provide detailed information on the extent to which the materials meet State academic content standards. According to the State, the free materials can be downloaded for use on a computer or hand-held device or printed and bound as a traditional textbook.

State data, in the form of the Academic Performance Index (API), indicate that, this year, California students scored nearly two percent higher on State assessment tests than last year. Overall, students showed a Statewide score of 754 -- up from 741 in 2008. Los Angeles, the State's largest school district scored 693 -- up from 681. Hispanic students showed the largest gain Statewide -- from 655 to 670 -- and African-American students improved from 630 to 641.

The [Los Angeles Times](#) reports that the Los Angeles school district has begun an initiative to

identify more gifted minority students. District-wide, white students -- 8.4 percent of the district's enrollment -- comprise 23 percent of its gifted students and Asian students -- 3.6 percent of enrollment -- make up another 16.4 percent of gifted students. Launched by the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, the initiative calls for testing all second-graders next year. The State allocates funding for gifted students according to total district enrollment. Most of the money is used for IQ testing and teacher training, with about \$25 per gifted student allotted to the schools.

Colorado Update

May 2010

As part of Colorado's effort to win up to \$175 million in Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition, the State legislature has passed a bill that would change the way teachers are evaluated and earn tenure. Hailed by reformers as a national model, SB 191 would:

- allow new teachers to earn non-probationary status after three positive annual evaluations, half of which will be based on their students' academic growth.
- drop veteran teachers from tenure after two consecutive "ineffective" evaluations.

The new evaluation system would begin Statewide in 2013-14.

Colorado State data show that 30 percent of Colorado's third-graders are not reading at the proficient level or above, down three percentage points from a year ago. Scores on the third-grade Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) also indicate that the economic, racial, and gender gaps have not been reduced. In the Denver area, some of the biggest drops occurred in the poorest districts. Scores in Sheridan went down 19 percentage points and those in Commerce City fell ten percentage points. According to [The Denver Post](#), the CSAP third-grade reading test is administered earlier than other CSAP exams. CSAP scores for other grades are slated for release in August.

Florida Update

May 2010

According to [Class Notes](#), the Florida legislature is considering the State's FY 2011 budget bill. The House has passed HB 5001 for \$67.2 billion, about \$2 billion less than the Senate version. The House bill proposes to cut per-pupil K-12 funding by \$52 -- less than one percent. The Senate bill would increase K-12 funding contingent on local property tax increases in all 67 school districts (a third of the districts have yet to approve the provision). The chambers are currently seeking to reconcile the two bills.

Florida's application in Round 1 of the Federal Race to the Top competition was not funded -- it is eligible for as much as \$700 million -- although it finished fourth among the more than forty states that applied. Among the criticisms of the Florida plan was a lack of "broad stakeholder support," meaning union presidents from only five of the State's 67 school districts signed onto the application. According to the [Orlando Sentinel](#), a State panel has come up with an approach which State officials hope will win union support for its Round 2 RTTT application. The new plan includes merit pay for teachers with 35 percent of each teacher's evaluation based on student test scores and 15 percent on other student performance criteria. After the first year, the weightings would shift to 40 percent test scores and ten percent other factors (the Round 1 RTTT evaluation plan based 51 percent of a teacher's evaluation on test scores).

Florida's new high school graduation requirements, signed into law in April and to be fully effective in 2013, call for more rigorous math and science courses and end-of-course exams. The [St. Petersburg Times](#) reports that school districts across the State are preparing for the requirements to be phased in starting this Fall. Entering high school freshmen this year will have to complete geometry. Then in 2011, 2012, and 2013, biology, Algebra II, and chemistry or physics, respectively, will be added to the graduation requirements. As the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test is phased out at the high school level, end-of-course exams counting at least 30 percent of a student's grade will be required. State officials estimate that the cost of developing the end-of-course exams will be approximately \$1.5 million per test each

year. The Algebra II test has already been developed and is being field-tested in several districts.

The Orlando Sentinel reports that many Florida high schools have been artificially improving their graduation rates by transferring struggling students to adult education centers and dropping them from school enrollment lists. State data indicate that 17,349 members of the Class of 2009 were transferred to adult education programs. The Statewide graduation rate, calculated at 76.3 percent, drops to 68.8 percent when the adult education transfers are counted. When a new calculation method kicks in with the Class of 2012, some high schools could see their graduation rates drop by as much as 20 percent.

Georgia Update

May 2010

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reports that two bills being considered by the Georgia State legislature would eliminate some of the training requirements faced by the State's teachers. SR 1199 would have the State's Professional Standards Commission reduce -- over the next five years -- the required number of professional learning units (PLUs) teachers must earn every five years from ten (equivalent to 100 hours) to five. HB 1307 would allow teachers and classroom aides to waive ten PLUs for five years.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution also reports that Georgia's State Superintendent Kathy Cox will not run for a third term in office. She will, instead, become the first chief executive officer of the Education Delivery Institute, a new Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization whose purpose is to help states develop strategies for improving student achievement. With Cox's resignation effective on June 30, Governor Sonny Perdue will select an interim superintendent to serve until the November election.

Idaho Update

May 2010

Idaho Kids Count has prepared a 15-page report that describes Idaho's current and planned uses of Federal ARRA (stimulus) funds for early childhood education. Entitled "Making Use of Economic Recovery Funds: Child Care and Early Education Options for Idaho," the report summarizes the State's use of ARRA and other funds for early education and makes a series of recommendations for improving child care and early education in Idaho. The report is available at: www.idahokidscount.org

Indiana Update

May 2010

According to the Indianapolis Star, Indiana has decided not to apply under Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition, largely because of a lack of support from teacher unions. The State has, however, said it plans to go forward with many of the initiatives included in its RTTT approach, such as new pathways to teaching, a school leadership academy, and evaluating schools and teachers in part based on student standardized test scores.

The Indianapolis Star also reports that, under a new State plan, all Indiana schools will be rated on an A-to-F scale based on their students' performance on standardized tests. The new plan separates the State's rating system from the Federal "adequate yearly progress" system. The State has not yet determined the method for assigning school grades but is expecting to use measures of how students improve on State tests compared with their previous results and compared with other Indiana students with similar starting scores.

Iowa Update

May 2010

The Des Moines Register reports that Iowa, unsuccessful in Round 1 of the Federal Race to the Top competition, believes it is creating a stronger application for Round 2. The State's next application will focus on:

- providing intensive support for the State's lowest-achieving schools;
- building an improved assessment system better to measure student achievement; and
- developing valid principal and teacher evaluation systems.

The Register also reports that 245 of Iowa's 361 school districts -- representing 73 percent of the State's public school students -- have signed on to the State's application under RTTT Round 2. In Round 1, Iowa lost points because only 221 districts, representing 47 percent of the students, participated. A number of the State's large districts -- Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Sioux City, and Waterloo -- have decided to sign on.

The Iowa State Boards of Regents has approved a strategic plan for 2010-16 that includes a number of critical targets. Among these are:

- closing the graduate rate gap between minority and non-minority students from its current 13.7 percentage points to 6.8 percentage points by 2016; minority students now have a six-year graduation rate of 54.7 percent compared with 68.4 percent for non-minorities;
- increasing enrollment in distance education from the current 35,827 students to 41,201 by 2015-16; and
- increasing four-year graduation rates at State universities (e.g., for the University of Iowa, from 46.4 percent now to 51 percent by 2016).

Kansas Update

May 2010

Education Daily reports that Kansas had requested waivers of its obligation to maintain its special education spending. The waiver request was for \$60 million in both FY 2010 and FY 2011. The U.S. Department of Education approved a waiver of \$44 million for the current year. The State, citing a further drop in overall spending, countered that the waiver should be increased to \$58 million. As of May 18, the State has had no response from USED. The State says overall special education spending is expected to drop by one percent because the IDEA portion of the Federal stimulus package (\$55.7 million) did not offset the \$60 million cut imposed by the State legislature.

Louisiana Update

May 2010

The Advocate reports that a measure put forth by Governor Bobby Jindal to link teacher evaluations to student performance has been approved by the Louisiana legislature's House Education Committee. House Bill 1033 calls for teacher evaluations every year -- currently there are formal evaluations every three years -- and 50 percent of the review would be tied to growth in student achievement. If passed, the evaluation program would be tested for two years in selected districts before Statewide implementation in the 2012-13 school year.

As reported in The New Orleans Times-Picayune, next year, the New Orleans Recovery School District (RSD) expects to have 47 charter schools, up from 37 in the current school year. The number of traditional schools will drop from 33 to 23. Four new charters will open and six traditional schools will convert to charters. Moreover, many existing charter schools will expand their grade coverage and several traditional schools will reduce the number of grades they serve. A recent study by Stanford University researchers found that, despite mixed national results, Louisiana charter schools have outperformed traditional schools. RSD officials have said that "any additional charters really need to emanate from the community."

New State data indicate that about ten percent of the students in the New Orleans Recovery School District are at least two years older than the typical age for their grade. Because Louisiana requires students to pass the high-stakes LEAP exam in order to advance to the next grade, backlogs of students have developed in the fourth and eighth grades. For example, more than 20 percent of the RSD's eighth-graders are 16 or older.

Maine Update

May 2010

The Kennebec Journal reports that, next year, 33 of Maine's after-school and summer programs will lose a total of \$2.5 million in State funding -- about a third of their State money. The after-school programs, which provide academic tutoring, college preparation and enrichment activities to 10,000 students at 107 sites, are funded by a five-year grant under the Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. The State had promised the programs \$7.4 million for the 2010-11 school year, but they will get only \$4.9 million. The State is investigating why the State's promises to the programs are not being fulfilled.

Massachusetts Update

May 2010

The *Curriculum Matters* blog from [Education Week](#) notes that Massachusetts may not apply under Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition. At issue is the State's timeline for adopting the Common Core standards. State officials have said the State would not adopt standards they perceived as inferior to their own. Massachusetts lost points in RTTT Round 1 because it did not promise to adopt the common standards.

In late April, a State task force recommended setting a goal that, by 2020, 85 percent of Massachusetts students score at proficient or advanced on the State assessment. This is a departure from the Bush Administration's unrealistic NCLB goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014. State officials acknowledge that much more work is needed to fix underperforming schools, to expand programs for English language learners, and to strengthen elementary literacy programs. The State School Board is scheduled to consider the task force's recommendations at its next meeting.

[The Boston Globe](#) reports that Massachusetts education officials are developing a proposal to replace the English and math sections of the 12-year-old Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). The MCAS would be replaced by a new series of tests being developed by a consortium of more than 20 states known as the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career. State officials say the new testing system would probably have a similar mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions and passing would be a high school graduation requirement. The State expects the new testing would be done on computers, saving considerable printing and shipping costs for test booklets. The State would retain the science and technology sections of the MCAS which would continue to be a graduation requirement for high school students.

Beginning this Fall, Massachusetts' first virtual school will begin operation, according to the [Boston Globe](#). The Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield will serve up to 600 students

in grades K through 8. The Greenfield school and others under development are the outgrowth of new education law enacted in January which urges school districts to pursue innovations like cyber schools. State officials say the virtual schools could help students who are unable to attend traditional schools for medical or disciplinary reasons and could help reduce the State's dropout rate. In June, the State Board expects to approve final regulations for the virtual schools. The Boston school district, which already used online courses as supplements to traditional schools, has said it has no plans to establish a virtual school.

Also reported in [The Boston Globe](#), Massachusetts is undertaking an aggressive campaign to recruit hundreds of successful teachers to work in underperforming schools in Boston and eight other struggling school districts. Thirty-five schools with chronically low test scores will be the target of the recruited teachers. State officials have said they don't know how many positions will be available because a number of current teachers are expected to resign or be dismissed. Information on the program can be seen at: www.amazingteachers.org

A new report has found that the extra time Boston's charter school students spend in school -- when compared with students in traditional schools -- result in higher test scores. The City's charter schools average 378 hours a year more than traditional schools, allowing teachers to offer more instructional time and extra tutoring, and teachers have more opportunities for training, analyzing student data, and planning lessons. The report was prepared by the Boston Foundation which has supported charter schools and works with the Boston district to improve education. The district is working with the teachers union in hopes of adding up to an hour a day in the City's 12 designated underperforming schools.

Michigan Update

May 2010

According to State data, Michigan's high school dropout rate is down by three percentage points since the State adopted more rigorous graduation requirements in 2007. Despite critics' predictions that more students would drop out, the percentage of students leaving before graduation went down from 14 percent in 2007 to 11 percent in 2009.

In mid-May, the Michigan legislature passed a retirement incentive plan that could save schools as much as \$680 million next year. The [Detroit Free Press](#) reports that as many as 28,000 older school employees could be coaxed into retirement. This would allow some districts to cancel layoffs. Other good news for Michigan schools is the State sales tax which is bringing in more revenue than expected.

An audit by the Michigan Auditor General indicated that programs designed to improve low-performing high schools have been less successful than similar programs in elementary and middle schools. [Education Week](#) reports that a greater percentage of Michigan's high-priority Title I elementary and middle schools improved their academic performance compared with schools that did not get extra assistance between 2005 and 2008. High schools did not show the same improvement.

The [Detroit Free Press](#) reports that the Detroit school district will sign a new contract to bring the Teach for America program back to the district next Fall. TFA places new teachers in struggling schools for two years. But TFA teachers have not worked in Detroit for several years because of budget cuts. The Detroit teachers union has criticized the move because 2,000 Detroit teachers received layoff notices this Spring.

The Detroit school district is expanding its summer school program this year to nearly 40,000 students in almost every school. According to [The Detroit News](#), Summer Academy 2010 will operate five days a week from June 22 to July 29 and will be mandatory for K-8 students who

are not performing at grade level. Funded with Federal Title I money, the summer session will be open to students in all grades and will allow high school students to make up credits they may need to graduate.

Minnesota Update

May 2010

According to the Star Tribune, Minnesota will not apply for up to \$175 million in Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition. Governor Tim Pawlenty has said the State would not apply under RTTT unless the State legislature approved his proposals, including alternative certification routes for teachers, changing the tenure system, and aligning teacher pay and evaluations to student performance. The Governor has sharply criticized Democrats in the legislature for blocking his proposals.

New Jersey Update

May 2010

As part of New Jersey's plan to improve its chances of winning as much as \$400 million under the Federal Race to the Top competition, State officials have proposed a reform plan which includes: improved data systems to track students; a plan to close failing schools and reopen them under alternative providers; incorporating student performance factors in teacher evaluations; requiring five years for teacher tenure instead of three; and rewarding teachers for their students performance. In the first round of the RTTT competition, the State teachers union, as well as almost all local unions, did not support the State's application. It is not clear whether union support will be any stronger in Round 2.

NorthJersey.com reports that the New Jersey legislature has passed a bipartisan resolution in support of the State's RTTT application and the State teacher union has expressed its support for the resolution. Neither the legislative resolution nor the union has, however, endorsed the State's plans to use student performance as part of teacher evaluations.

New York Update

May 2010

According to The New York Times, New York State and the State's teachers' unions have reached an agreement to revise teacher evaluations completely, tying them, in part, to student test scores. Despite years of opposition to such an evaluation system, the unions have agreed in hopes of improving New York's chances of winning as much as \$700 million under the Federal Race to the Top competition. Initially, teachers would be measured on a 100-point scale with 40 percent based on student scores on State (20 percent) and local (20 percent) exams. After two years, the ratio would shift to 25 percent for State and 15 percent for local tests.

The New York State Senate has passed a bill, supported by the Governor, and charter school advocates that would increase the cap on the number of charter schools allowed in the State from 200 to 460. As reported in The New York Times, the measure would also require that charter schools enroll more special education students and English language learners. Supporters of the bill say its passage could improve New York's chances of funding under Round 2 of RTTT. However, most observers believe it is unlikely to pass the Assembly in its current form.

Education Week reports that, because of a lack of a 2010-11 budget due April 1, New York has delayed State aid payments to schools. Governor David Paterson has proposed delaying the payments -- now due on June 1 -- until the end of June. The State legislature has resisted this second delay. State officials had indicated the strong likelihood that many local school budgets would be rejected in the May 18 voting (which did not include the State's five largest districts). On the contrary, however, 92 percent of proposed school budgets were approved -- well above the average approval rate of 83 percent.

North Carolina Update

May 2010

According to Education Daily, an approach used by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district to implement a “transformation” model looks to be a strategy for improving the lowest-performing schools that could be favored by the U.S. Department of Education. One of four model specified under the Federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, “transformation” requires a district to replace the principal and at least half the staff of a struggling school. Created in 2008, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg approach, called the Strategic Staffing Initiative, allows new principals to bring with them to a new school five teachers and to dismiss five teachers. District officials say the Initiative has improved student outcomes in schools where principal leadership was lacking.

The Gaston County school district has received a \$2 million donation intended to cut the district’s dropout rate. Given by Ron and Katherine Harper, the money will be part of a \$4 million “SMART Board in Every Classroom” campaign. The district expects to raise the other \$2 million through contributions, community-based organizations, and technology grants. The Gaston Gazette reports that the County currently has SMART Boards in 900 of its 1,800 classrooms and expects the campaign to equip the other 900 classrooms by April 2011.

Ohio Update

May 2010

The Columbus Dispatch reports that Ohio, as part of its effort to improve its Round 2 application under the Federal Race to the Top competition, has signed on 311 of Ohio's 613 school districts and 199 of its 322 charter schools as of May 15. The State expects that about 40 more districts will agree to participate before the State's RTTT application is submitted. Standing to win up to \$400 million if its Round 2 application is successful, Ohio finished tenth in RTTT's Round 1 with 266 participating school districts.

In mid-May, a group of Ohio charter schools filed suit against the private management company that operates them. Hope Academies and Life Skills Centers in Cleveland and Akron have challenged the operating authority of White Hat Management, one of the largest for-profit charter school operators in the country. Through its existing management agreements, White Hat has control of 96 percent of the public money that goes to the schools and has the power to terminate school staff. With the schools agreements scheduled to expire on June 30, the schools allege White Hat is unwilling to negotiate terms.

Oregon Update

May 2010

According to The Oregonian, Oregon has decided not to submit an application under Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition. The State's Round 1 RTTT proposal was rated the seventh worst of the more than 40 submitted. Governor Ted Kulongoski says he will convene a commission to create a package of school reform policies to be presented to the legislature in 2011.

Education Week reports that, in 2009, Oregon placed a moratorium on virtual school enrollments in order to look at governance and equity issues. State officials were concerned about fairness because some students can afford a learning coach in the home and Internet connections while others cannot. When the moratorium was passed, many thought the virtual schools would be closed down completely. But that has not happened and, in fact, there is a waiting list for some Oregon virtual schools. Data show that students in the State's online schools perform better on standardized tests than other students and operate at a cost of less than \$5,600 per student compared with \$10,000 per student for the State as a whole.

Chalkboard Project, an Oregon-based non-profit, has been working with 12 school districts in the State to gain Federal funds to support "locally-designed, teacher-led innovations" to improve student performance. The specific project, called Creative Leadership Achieves Student Success (CLASS) is pursuing grants from Investing in Innovation (i³) and the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF).

As reported in eSchoolNews, Oregon is the first state to use *Google Apps for Education* in K-12 schools Statewide. *Google Apps* allows students to get teacher feedback on classroom projects in real time and to create web sites and online videos. State officials say moving to *Google Apps* will save the State as much as \$1.5 million in IT costs because no hardware, software, or maintenance is required by the schools. Oregon's *Google Apps* agreement is available on the web so other states and school districts can use it as a starting point for their own Google

agreements.

Rhode Island Update

May 2010

According to Education Week, a new study by the New York-based Wallace Foundation commends Providence for its network of after-school initiatives targeting middle school students. Providence is divided into three After Zones -- neighborhood-based, after-school campuses operating in a range of sites including libraries and recreation centers. The study cites the keys to Providence's success as: (1) a well-coordinated network of after-school providers; (2) consistent collection of enrollment and attendance data; (3) effective leadership; (4) the use of multiple sites; and (5) sensitivity to the needs of middle school students.

South Dakota Update

May 2010

The Argus Leader also reports that South Dakota has dropped out of Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition because the State's priorities do not align with Federal priorities. With up to \$75 million available for a successful RTTT application, South Dakota finished last among the 41 that applied in Round 1 of RTTT. Its application indicated a plan to spend \$74 million for the creation of a residential school for Native American students focused on science, technology, engineering, and math.

The Sioux City Argus Leader reports that, between 2003 and 2007, 12 South Dakota school districts switched to four-day school weeks. Since then another four have switched and 15 more plan to switch in the next school year. District officials say that the four-day week saves on transportation and food costs and also provides extra time for teacher training and help for struggling students. However, test data indicate that students on four-day schedules suffer academically. Before switching to four-day weeks, the 12 districts that switched between 2003 and 2007 were an average of 4.2 percentage points below the State average in reading and math proficiency. After the transition, they were 6.3 and 4.7 percentage points behind the State average in reading and math, respectively.

Texas Update

May 2010

The Washington Post reports that the Texas State school board has approved the State's controversial social studies standards. Condemned by academics, teachers, and politicians, the new standards emphasize conservative news and present many historical facts that are at odds with accepted history. Teachers will be trained in the new standards beginning this Fall and the standards will be first used in the Fall of 2011. Some conservative members of the board will be leaving office at the end of the year; it is possible the standards could be revised again before they are implemented.

The Houston Chronicle reports that, this Summer, a Texas review panel will select materials under a new textbook adoption for pre-kindergarteners -- the first in nearly a decade. The new materials, including things from workbooks to puppets, will be in preschool classrooms for the 2011-12 school year. Serving a total of 215,000 students, the Texas pre-kindergarten program is available at no cost to all low-income students and English language learners. Under the State's 2008 guidelines, pre-kindergartners are expected to learn such skills as naming 20 letters and counting to 30.

Also reported in the Houston Chronicle, nearly 23,000 Texas secondary school students stopped attending class in 2008 and were identified as home schooled. The rate of growth of home schooling in Texas has been dramatic in recent years. But Texas State education officials are suspicious that some schools are disguising dropouts as home-schooled students. It is believed that these schools are "dumping" special needs students using the home-schooling designation. The State's lax documentation practices and its "hands-off" policies make it next to impossible to verify the status of these students.

According to THE Journal, the Katy school district is using online resources to educate parents. The 60,000-student district is holding evening technology showcase events at individual schools to let parents learn about the way their children are using technology. In panel sessions, high

school students would explain what they do in class and answer questions from parents.

Vermont Update

May 2010

The Boston Herald reports that Vermont has decided not to apply for the \$40 million for which it is eligible under the Federal Race to the Top competition. State education officials are generally pleased with Vermont's existing education system -- as evidenced by NAEP results -- and believe the legislative and policy changes required to meet RTTT's charter school and student-performance-based teacher pay requirements are not necessary for the State's educational success.

Washington Update

May 2010

Students in Washington State are, for the first time, taking the new Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) assessment which replaces the 12-year-old Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The MSP reduces the total number of testing days from eight to five. The reading, math, and science sections of the MSP take just one each (instead of two for the WASL) and the writing section takes two days (the same as the WASL). In early May, about 25 percent of Washington students in grades 6-8 took the MSP reading and math sections online. Some educators have criticized the MSP for not being diagnostic enough and for taking three months to score, making it less useful for informing instruction.

West Virginia Update

May 2010

According to The Charleston Gazette, West Virginia has decided not to apply for up to \$75 million in Round 2 of the Federal Race to the Top competition. Among the areas of contention during the legislative session that ended in May were merit pay for teachers, charter schools, and teacher evaluations, all of which are important elements of RTTT. Teachers unions strongly opposed Governor Joe Manchin's proposals.

During the just completed legislative session, Governor Manchin also asked for \$30 million for principal and teacher bonuses. The Governor's plan would provide \$1,000 annual supplements to principals and teachers who work in high-poverty or high-minority schools. Math and science teachers in such schools would get an additional \$500. Principals and teachers in schools that met student performance goals could earn an additional \$1,000.

The Governor's proposal also included a bill to create alternative teacher certification routes and a plan for "Charter Innovation Zone 2.0 Schools" which, unlike charter schools, does not allow outside parties to take over schools and leaves in place current school personnel laws.

Wisconsin Update

May 2010

A February review of Wisconsin's virtual charter schools gave the schools favorable marks. Conducted by the Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, the survey found that 95 percent of virtual high school students were satisfied with the availability and amount of contact with their teachers. The audit also found that 93 percent of the money spent went to teachers and curriculum. State officials believe that the number of virtual school students -- currently 3,635 in grades K-12 -- will hit the State's cap of 5,250 by the 2011-12 school year.

As reported in Education Week, a new Wisconsin law gives local district superintendents more authority to turn around failing schools. Under the new law, school boards in low-performing districts are required to adopt model teaching standards and establish new programs to help struggling students earlier. They must also provide more learning time for students in need, including lengthening the school day or academic year. The new law has been supported by the current Democratic Governor and the Democratic candidate in the upcoming gubernatorial election, but opposed by the two Republican candidates.